Shut Up

In the pages of history, we discover powerful lessons about the importance of controlling what we say. Our words carry incredible power, and how we use them, or choose to hold them back, can shape destinies and change the course of history.

Let us look first at a man who understood the power of strategic silence. William of Orange, born in 1533 and later called William the Silent, served in a high position under Spanish rule in the Netherlands. He learned of harsh plans to persecute Protestants and centralize power in ways that threatened freedoms. Rather than speaking out rashly or revealing his opposition too soon, he held back his true thoughts. He remained outwardly loyal while quietly building alliances and preparing a resistance. Because he controlled what he said and when he said it, William was able to lead the Dutch Revolt successfully. His restraint helped spark the Eighty Years' War and ultimately led to the independence of the Netherlands, creating a prosperous republic.

In stark contrast, consider what happened in 1943 during World War II. Congressman Andrew May returned from inspecting the Pacific theater and held a press conference. In his remarks, he freely gave away critical military information, disclosing that Japanese depth charges were exploding at too shallow a depth and that American submarines were surviving as a result. This information reached the enemy. The Japanese quickly adjusted their depth charges to detonate deeper. The consequences were devastating. Historians estimate that this careless revelation led to the loss of at least ten American submarines and the deaths of approximately eight hundred sailors.

These two examples from history illustrate clearly the difference between wise control of the tongue and the danger of speaking without restraint. One man built a nation through discretion. The other contributed to great loss through loose words.

The Bible addresses this truth directly. In Proverbs 21:23 it says, Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity.

And in James 3:6 we read, The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

You can see from God's word that failing to control what you say can spread destruction like a wildfire. Yet by guarding your speech, as William of Orange did, you can avoid calamity and even achieve great things for God's kingdom.

As we continue in this message, we will unpack more of what Scripture teaches about taming the tongue and how the Holy Spirit empowers us to speak with wisdom and hold our peace when necessary.

In the pages of history we saw how controlling what you say can build nations or cost lives. Scripture now takes us deeper into the same truth by showing why bad things happen and how loose words often open the door for them.

Jesus explains this clearly in Luke 13:1-17 where it says, Now there were some present at the same time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered them, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the men who dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all perish in the same way. He spoke this parable. A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. He said to the vine dresser, Behold, these three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and found none. Cut it down! Why does it waste the soil? He answered, Lord, leave it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit, fine, but if not, after that, you can cut it down. He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath day. Behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years. She was bent over and could in no way straighten herself up. When Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, Woman, you are freed from your infirmity. He laid his hands on her, and immediately she stood up straight and glorified God. The ruler of the synagogue, being indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the multitude, There are six days in which men ought to work. Therefore come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day! Therefore the Lord answered him, You hypocrites! Does not each one of you free his ox or his donkey from the stall on the Sabbath and lead him away to water? Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound eighteen long years, be freed from this bondage on the Sabbath day? As he said these things, all his adversaries were disappointed, and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

Jesus states here that there are four variables that are a cause for everything that happens. They are God, Satan, Mankind, and Probability. The parable of the fig tree is a parable God’s judgment on those who don’t bare fruit. Jesus healing the woman of infirmity shows Satan as the cause. The tower of Siloam falling and killing 18 people shows how probability is a causal force. And finally Jesus shows humans as a causal force with the Galileans killed by Pilate. Bad things happen because of clear variables at work in our world. One

major variable is human actions. Genesis 1:26 gives every person legal rulership over this universe, which means people have the freedom to choose good, neutral, or evil actions. Those choices cause most of the harm we see. In fact, people are the source of most likely half your problems, because Satan usually works through other people to bring destruction.

Psalm 141:3 NASBS
“Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my lips.” When you speak too freely or reveal what should stay hidden, you hand other people the information and tools they need to hurt you. Satan loves to work through those opened doors. Four major reasons why we speak when we shouldn’t is love/acceptance, arrogance, ignorance, and anger.

Samson learned the hard way that he shouldn’t have revealed existential information to gain love and acceptance. He repeatedly engaged with Delilah’s demands to know the secret of his strength until he finally gave away the source of his strength. In Judges 16:17 he said, If I am shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I will become weak and be like any other man. Delilah passed that information to the Philistines, they shaved his head while he slept, and he was captured, blinded, and enslaved. One loose conversation with the wrong person cost him everything.

These examples line up perfectly with what we saw in William of Orange and Congressman Andrew May. William held his tongue and protected his plans from the wrong people. Andrew May spoke freely in a press conference and handed critical information to the enemy. In both cases the harm came through people, exactly as Jesus described.

God wants you to guard your words because your speech can either close the door on harm or swing it wide open. The same power that built a nation through silence can protect your life today if you choose wisely what to say and what to keep silent. As we move forward, we will see how the Holy Spirit gives you the strength to tame your tongue and speak only what builds up instead of what tears down.

The second reason we say more than we have to is arrogance. Arrogance makes you believe your opinion or challenge carries more weight than it does, so you speak boldly when silence would be wiser. In the days of the judges, Gaal the son of Ebed showed this clearly. In Judges 9:28 it says, Then Gaal the son of Ebed said, Who is Abimelech, and who is Shechem, that we should serve him? Is he not the son of Jerubbaal, and is not Zebul his officer? Serve the men of Hamor the father of Shechem. But why should we serve Abimelech? Gaal continued speaking with arrogance through verse 38, boasting and stirring up the people of Shechem against Abimelech. His proud

words made it to Abimelech’s ears and sparked conflict, division, and eventual bloodshed. What began as arrogant speech ended in destruction for many. Arrogance always convinces you that your words are armor when it actually sets you up as a target. That’s why pride comes before the fall because they believe their words shield them from danger when in fact it gives your enemies the knowledge needed to attack you when you least expect it. Knowledge you give in pride and arrogance will be used against you when you least expect it.

The third reason is ignorance. Many times you speak simply because you do not understand the full situation or the timing. On the mountain of transfiguration, Peter spoke out of ignorance. In Luke 9:33 it says, And as these were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here, and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah, not realizing what he was saying. His suggestion was unnecessary. In this instance no harm came from his words, but speaking in ignorance rarely turns out so well. More often than not it creates confusion, embarrassment, or opens doors for problems that could have been avoided. In this instance Peter would have benefited from Proverbs 17:28 NASBS
Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is considered wise; When he closes his lips, he is considered prudent.

The fourth reason is anger. When emotions run hot, the tongue wants to lash out even when silence would protect everyone involved. Aaron faced this test when his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who offered unauthorized fire before the Lord and were consumed by God’s judgment. In Leviticus 10:3 it says, Then Moses said to Aaron, It is what the LORD spoke, saying, By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored. So Aaron kept silent. Aaron wisely held his tongue. Speaking out of anger would not have changed the situation for the better and would only have made things worse. This is why Psalms 4:4 tells you, Tremble, and do not sin. Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.

These four forces, love for acceptance, arrogance, ignorance, and anger, push you to speak when silence would serve you far better. Each one hands other people or the enemy the very information or opportunity they need to bring harm. William of Orange refused every one of them. You can too.

The Bible warns you plainly about this pattern. Proverbs 10:19 says, When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

And James 3:5 says, So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small

fire.

Understanding these reasons is the first step toward real change. The good news is that the Holy Spirit stands ready to give you the strength to overcome every one of them so you can tame your tongue and speak only what builds up instead of what tears down.

With these four dangerous reasons constantly pushing us to speak when we should not, it is time to adopt a better philosophy for how we use our words.

One helpful philosophy comes from Stoicism. Stoicism teaches strong self-control and taking full responsibility for your own actions and reactions. The Stoics understood that you cannot control what other people do or what happens around you, but you can always control how you respond. This includes mastering your tongue. Self-control is one of the main virtues in Stoicism. It trains you to pause, think clearly, and choose either wise words or silence instead of reacting out of ignorance, pride, anger, or the need for acceptance.

Building on this idea, you should live by the simple philosophy of speaking only when it truly benefits you or others. Before you open your mouth or type a message, ask yourself important questions. Is telling that joke possibly going to give someone an opportunity to choose to be offended and attempt to destroy you? Is telling that personal story going to give someone the ability to ostracize you or use it against you later? On the social media platform X, when you are about to post something inflammatory, the app prompts you and asks if you really want to post this. You should have that same internal prompt operating inside you at all times.

Simply being quiet will also save you from legal trouble. Every lawyer will tell you the same advice: when you are engaged with law enforcement, you shut up. Speaking can only hurt you in those situations and almost never helps.

Jesus set the highest standard for this kind of careful and restrained speech. In Matthew 5:33-37 it says, Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, You SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD. But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no, anything beyond these is of evil.

And in Matthew 12:36-37 it says, But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For

by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

The danger of speaking rash words or vows appears clearly in history. In the Old Testament, Jephthah made a hasty vow before battle. He promised the Lord that if God gave him victory over the Ammonites, he would sacrifice whatever first came out of his house when he returned. When his only daughter came out to greet him with joy, he had to fulfill that terrible vow, bringing great tragedy and loss to his family.

Centuries later, Martin Luther made a similar vow. In 1505, while caught in a violent thunderstorm and terrified by lightning, he cried out to Saint Anne and vowed that if he survived he would become a monk. He kept that vow and entered the monastery, and led to a reformation of the church that split completely from Rome. One spoken vow changed the direction of his life in ways he never intended.

These stories, together with the examples of Samson, Gaal, Peter, and Aaron, prove that our words carry lasting consequences. The wise person builds the habit of restraint. You speak only when it truly benefits the situation, and you remain silent when it does not.

The good news is that the Holy Spirit stands ready to help you develop this disciplined philosophy of speech and give you the power to live it out every single day.

With this philosophy of restraint firmly in place, we come to the heart of the matter. Why does God hold us responsible for our words? God holds you accountable for your words because of the law He established in Genesis 1:26. In Genesis 1:26 it says, Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

You were created in His image with the purpose to continue the chain of creation. Just as God spoke and brought the universe into existence, you carry that same creative authority. God’s god is His own Word, as His Word sets the standard for everything that creates value within our universe. If God’s laws and Word can be violated at any time, then our universe will lose all value and meaning. And just as God created us, we will create universes that will also go on to create universes. In Psalms 82:6 it says, I said, You are gods, And all of you are sons of the Most High.
You cannot go on to create value-based universes if your word means nothing. This is why God holds you to the standard of your own words.

The Bible shows this principle in action very clearly. King David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and then arranged the murder of her husband Uriah the Hittite to cover up his sin. God sent the prophet Nathan to confront him. Nathan told David a story about a rich man who had many lambs but stole the only lamb belonging to a poor man to feed a traveler. David became very angry and declared that the rich man deserved to die and must repay the poor man four times over. Nathan then looked at David and said, You are the man. God judged David using the very words that had come from David's own mouth. The judgment David pronounced on the rich man in the story became the judgment that fell on him and his household.

The same thing happened with King Ahab. Ahab had just defeated Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram, in battle. The Lord had clearly commanded Ahab through a prophet to destroy Ben-Hadad completely. Instead, Ahab made a peace treaty with him and let him go free. Later, a prophet disguised himself as a wounded soldier and approached Ahab with a story. He said he had been given a prisoner to guard during the battle but the man escaped. Ahab immediately declared that the soldier must pay with his life for letting the prisoner go. The prophet then removed his disguise and told Ahab, So shall your judgment be, you yourself have decided it. Because Ahab had failed to obey God's command and let Ben-Hadad live, God used Ahab's own words of judgment against him.

These stories make it clear. Your words are not casual. They carry the same legal weight God gave you under Genesis 1:26. When you speak, you create reality, and God holds you responsible for what you create.

This is why Jesus warned so strongly about careless speech. In Matthew 12:36-37 it says, But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

The same power that built nations through silence or destroyed lives through loose talk now rests on you. God expects you to treat your words with the same care He treats His own, because you are made in His image and you carry the authority to create value or destruction.
The good news is that the Holy Spirit stands ready to give you the strength to speak with that same holy restraint so every word you release truly builds and never tears down.